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ELDER ABUSE

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Professionals and concerned citizens together can help protect elders who might be harmed or exploited. This brochure tells you how to report elder abuse and what practical services are available to help the abused elder.

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Elder abuse.
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A NATIONAL DISGRACE

Although few people realize it, physical and mental abuse of the elderly is a growing problem in this country. Older citizens are often neglected, kept in isolation, denied proper food or medical care, verbally abused, threatened with removal from their current home, physically restrained, hit, and even beaten by their caretakers.

Elder abuse is a form of family violence which, like spouse and child abuse, can occur in any home regardless of income or education levels.

The average abused elder is a woman (two out of three times), 75 or older, living with her adult children or relatives and in poor health from a major physical or mental impairment.

Abused elders often don't want to talk about their troubles. Embarrassment, pride and fear block them from seeking help. The solution depends on others—like you—to spot the signs of abuse, neglect and exploitation and to report it. This brochure tells you how.

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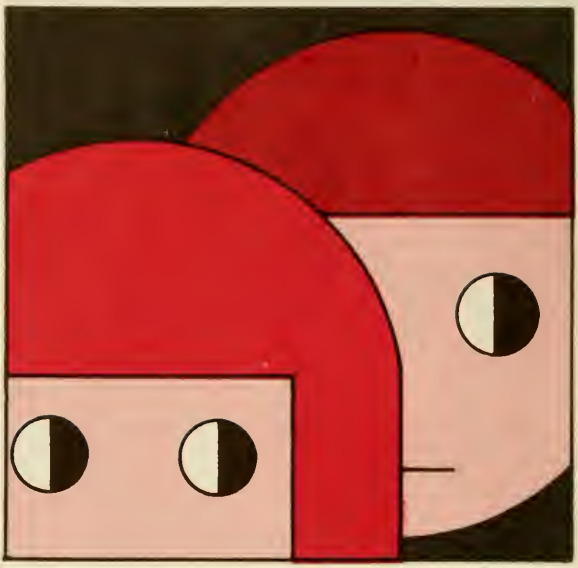
WHAT LEADS TO ELDER ABUSE?

Caretakers who aren't coping well with stress may take it out on their families. Stresses may arise from:

- the burden of shouldering the care and costs of an elder
- the elder becoming increasingly dependent on the caretaker—physically, emotionally, and economically
- age-related diseases and medications which may alter elders' personalities and make them very hard to care for
- caretakers' resentment at using up what could be their inheritance to care for the elder
- being mistreated by the parent as a child, which may result in the child mistreating the now frail and dependent parent.

Some elders abuse themselves. They may live on an improper diet. Some refuse or are unable to eat, seek medical care or follow the advice of doctors. They may use alcohol or drugs to excess.



RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF ABUSE

Whenever elders are mistreated, there are two victims: the elder and the caretaker. Both need help. You may suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation if an elder shows one or more of these signs:

- talks about being harmed *or* won't talk when clearly there's been harm done
- repeated injuries
- untreated medical conditions
- inadequate diet
- chemical/alcohol abuse by elder or family
- changes in mental state
- dirty body or clothes
- evidence of puncture wounds, cuts, burns and abrasions or hair pulling
- clusters of bruises or wounds
- frequent change of doctors coupled with signs of injuries not reported on patient's medical history
- unbelievable explanations for condition
- patient brought in for treatment by someone other than caretaker
- difficulty walking or moving, possibly caused by internal injuries
- misuse of elder's funds or property

ABUSE MUST BE REPORTED

If you know or suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation, report it immediately. The law protects you from prosecution if you make your report in good faith. Your name will not be revealed. You may also report wthout giving your name.

If you work where elders or their caretakers come for services (medical, mental health, residential, educational or legal), you must by law report suspicions or knowledge of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Professional privilege isn't protection from possible misdemeanor charges if you fail to report abuse.

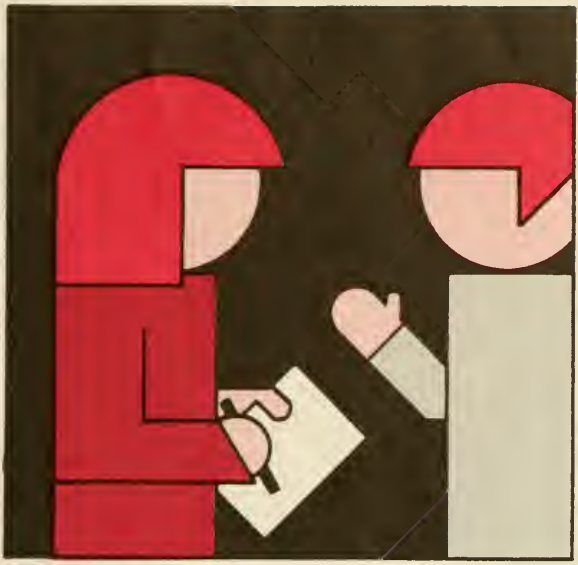
REPORTING ABUSE

If the victim lives in the community, you may make your report to the Department whose address is on the back of this brochure or to a county attorney.

If the victim lives in a long-term care facility (nursing, personal care, room, or retirement home), you may call, free, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman at 1-800-322-2272.

When you report, be ready to give as much of the following information as you can:

- name and address of the elder and the person responsible for her or his care
- approximate age of the elder
- what led you to suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation
- description of the nature and extent of the problem
- your name (It will be kept confidential, but it's important for verification if you are one of those required by law to report.)



TAKING ACTION ON REPORTS

Investigation

Social workers will check out complaints made on behalf of elders who live in the community. State health workers and the Long Term Care Ombudsman inquire into elder abuse in long term care facilities.

Planning for services

The social worker may design a service plan to remedy or protect the elder from physical or mental harm. Services which are given directly or arranged for by the social worker can include:

Support in the home: arranging for home attendants, home-delivered meals, volunteer friendly visitors, home repair and health services

Placement: arranging for moves to better living situations, closing up the house and relocating personal possessions

Community support: enlisting support from relatives, friends, lawyers, police, landlords, clergy, bankers or community agencies such as senior centers, public health departments and mental health centers

Health care: transportation to medical services, arranging for doctor's appointments.

Financial: income assistance, shopping and consumer counseling, legal consultation to arrange property protection, trusts or conservatorships, advocacy against unscrupulous vendors and bill collectors

Legal intervention: full or temporary court guardianship on behalf of extremely abused elders who can't help themselves in order to stop physical or mental abuse (used only as a last resort)

ELDER'S RIGHTS

An elder who is being abused has all the rights of any citizen unless these have been removed by the court or competent jurisdiction. These rights must and will be considered in any plans made to remedy abuse of an elder.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND REHABILITATION SERVICES
P.O. Box 4210, 111 No. Sanders St., Helena, Montana 59604

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